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THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION AND TWO CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

ANNCR: VOA NEWS ANALYST RONALD J. DUNLAVEY DISCUSSES THE POSSIBLE ROLE OF TWO CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES IN THE NINETEEN SEVENTY-SIX ELECTION CAMPAIGN IN AMERICA:

VOICE: THERE WERE TWO DEVELOPMENTS IN WASHINGTON THIS WEEK RELATING TO ISSUES WHICH COULD POSSIBLY AFFECT NEXT NOVEMBER'S PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. THE FIRST WAS A STATEMENT BY PRESIDENT FORD ON ABORTION. AND THE OTHER WAS THE GOVERNMENT'S DECISION TO ALLOW THE NEW BRITISH- FRENCH SUPERSONIC AIRPLANE-- THE CONCORDE-- TO LAND AT AIRPORTS IN WASHINGTON AND NEW YORK CITY.

ABORTION--LONG THOUGHT OF PRIMARILY AS A PROBLEM INVOLVING SOCIAL ETHICS, RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND CONSTITUTIONAL PROBLEMS-- NOW LOOMS AS AN IMPORTANT POLITICAL FACTOR AS WELL. IT APPEARS THAT FEELINGS ON THE ISSUE ARE MUCH STRONGER THAN HAD BEEN ANTICIPATED. TWO YEARS AGO THE SUPREME COURT RULED THAT ABORTIONS CANNOT BE PROHIBITED BY LAW DURING THE FIRST THREE MONTHS OF PREGNANCY, CAN BE REGULATED FOR CERTAIN REASONS DURING THE SECOND THREE, AND CAN BE FORBIDDEN DURING THE FINAL THREE BY THE INDIVIDUAL STATES IF THEY DESIRE TO DO SO. THERE WERE THOSE WHO THOUGHT THAT THE COURT'S DECISION MIGHT QUIET THE ABORTION CONTROVERSY. INSTEAD, OPPOSITION HAS INCREASED BY THOSE WHO ARGUE THAT THE COURT DECISION VIOLATES THE CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS OF BOTH THE UNBORN FETUS AND THE FATHER-- WHOSE CONSENT IS NOT REQUIRED FOR ABORTION. THERE IS EVEN A MOVE TO HAVE CONGRESS PASS A CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT MAKING ABORTIONS ILLEGAL EXCEPT UNDER CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES. SUCH AN AMENDMENT IS NOT GIVEN MUCH CHANCE OF PASSING-- BUT THE MERE FACT THAT A CAMPAIGN OF THIS TYPE IS UNDERWAY REFLECTS THE GROWING IMPORTANCE OF ABORTION AS A POLITICAL ISSUE. AND,

NOT SURPRISINGLY, POTENTIAL PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES ARE QUESTIONED ABOUT THEIR STAND ON ABORTION WHEREVER THEY GO.

PRESIDENT FORD'S STATEMENT LAST TUESDAY WAS OBVIOUSLY THE RESULT OF CAREFUL STUDY-- AND ALSO REFLECTED AN AWARENESS OF THE PITFALLS SURROUNDING THIS ISSUE. HE SAID THAT HE THOUGHT THE SUPREME COURT HAD GONE TOO FAR, BUT SAID HE WOULD OPPOSE ANY CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT PROHIBITING ABORTION. THE WHOLE MATTER, HE SAID, SHOULD BE TURNED OVER TO THE INDIVIDUAL STATES. MR. FORD'S VIEWS MAY WELL FIND CONSIDERABLE SUPPORT. BUT HIS STATEMENT ALSO CAME IN FOR CRITICISM FROM BOTH SIDES IN THE CONTROVERSY. SOME ANTI-ABORTIONISTS CALLED IT "NEGATIVE AND EQUIVOCATING," WHILE SOME PRO-ABORTIONISTS ARGUED THAT IT UNDERCUT THE SUPREME COURT. THIS REACTION REFLECTS THE POLITICAL SENSITIVITY OF THE ISSUE.

THE OTHER DEVELOPMENT-- THE CONCORDE DECISION-- IS OF A SOMEWHAT LESSER MAGNITUDE AND DOES NOT AFFECT THE PRESIDENT DIRECTLY. BUT THE DECISION-- WHICH HAS AROUSED A GREAT DEAL OF CRITICISM-- WAS MADE BY THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION, WHICH COMES UNDER THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH, AND WHOSE CHIEF WAS APPOINTED BY MR. FORD. FURTHERMORE, THE PRESIDENT IS KNOWN TO BE A LONG-TIME SUPPORTER OF SUPERSONIC AIR TRAVEL, AND WAS QUOTED AS BEING "DELIGHTED" WITH THE DECISION-- MADE WEDNESDAY-- TO ALLOW THE CONCORDE TO LAND AT WASHINGTON AND NEW YORK ON A SIXTEEN-MONTH TRIAL BASIS. OPPONENTS OF THE CONCORDE HAVE ALREADY BEGUN DIRECTING THEIR CRITICISM AT THE WHITE HOUSE.

MR. FORD HAS THIS CONSOLATION, HOWEVER: ALL THE OTHER PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES WILL HAVE TO DEAL WITH THE SAME ISSUES. THAT, OF COURSE, IS ONE OF THE DIFFICULT THINGS ABOUT AN ELECTION

YEAR-- AND, FOR THAT MATTER, THE WHOLE ELECTION PROCESS IN A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY. IT IS ALSO POSSIBLE, OF COURSE, THAT THESE TWO ISSUES WILL TURN OUT TO BE STRICTLY MARGINAL COMPARED TO SUCH PROBLEMS AS THE STATE OF THE ECONOMY, SCHOOL BUSING, OR DETENTE WITH THE SOVIET UNION. BUT THEY WILL CERTAINLY AFFECT SOME VOTERS. AND IN A CLOSE ELECTION EVEN MARGINAL ISSUES CAN HAVE CONSIDERABLE AND SOMETIMES CRITICAL IMPORTANCE.